Operations Toolkit: AI Prompts for Founders

Get the work done the same way every day, with or without you in the room.

Important: these prompts help you write down and improve how work is done. They do not replace safety, hygiene or product regulations. Confirm all safety and regulatory requirements with the relevant regulator (for food and drink, NAFDAC) or a qualified safety professional before you adopt any procedure.

About this toolkit

Three AI prompts that help a founder run the business on systems instead of memory: written procedures for important tasks, a daily checklist the team can follow, and a way to find and fix slow or costly processes. Each prompt makes the AI act as an operations adviser: it asks how your business works today, then builds the document around it.

Who it is for: founders whose business depends on them remembering everything, or whose team does the same task differently each time.

What each prompt comes with:

- The problem it solves, in plain words
- The prompt itself, ready to copy
- A ready-to-use Word or Excel file, created by the AI for your business
- A sample output from our fictional sample business
- A short "check before you rely on this" list
- The decisions to make from the result

Start where it hurts most. If quality or safety is the worry, start with an SOP. If things get forgotten, start with the daily checklist. If customers wait too long or money arrives late, start with the process map.

How to use these prompts

You don't need any technical skills: copy, paste, answer questions, then review.

1. Open an AI assistant that can create files, such as Claude, ChatGPT, Gemini or Microsoft Copilot.
2. Copy everything inside the grey prompt box and paste it into a new chat.
3. Answer the AI's questions one at a time. Describe how the work really happens, not how it should happen. Better still, ask the person who does the task to answer with you.
4. Review the output with the "check before you rely on this" list.
5. Ask for changes in plain words, for example "add a step to weigh each pack".
6. Download the Word or Excel file the AI creates and save it. If your AI tool can't create files, it will give you the text or tables to paste in yourself.

Safety and regulations come first. The prompts tell the AI not to invent rules. Always confirm safety, hygiene and product requirements with the regulator or a qualified expert.

The sample business

Ewa Foods Ltd is a fictional business created by Outlier Venture Lab for illustration. Its figures are realistic but invented.

Ewa Foods makes plantain chips and pepper soup spice blend in Ikorodu, Lagos, and sells about ₦5 million a month. It has a production lead, three production assistants, a sales officer, a driver and a part-time accountant. Supermarkets and distributors buy about 60% of its products and pay 60 days after receiving an invoice.

Ewa scored 63% (Needs work) on Operations in its Business Health Check. Its main problem was that most processes lived in the founder's head.

Prompt 1: How do I get this done the same way every time?

Builds: a standard operating procedure (SOP) for one important task, plus a one-page quick guide to post where the work happens. **Word file:** SOP.

The prompt (copy everything in the box)

```
Act as an experienced operations adviser who works with small businesses and early-stage
founders in Nigeria and Africa.

Help me write a standard operating procedure (SOP) for one important task in my business,
so anyone trained can do it the same way, to the same standard, even when I'm not there.

How to work with me:
- Ask the questions below ONE AT A TIME and wait for each answer.
- Keep your replies short: no more than 3 or 4 sentences between questions. Save
explanations for the final results.
- If I'm unsure about an answer, help me think it through with one or two simple follow-up
questions.

Question 1: What is my business called, and what does it do?
Question 2: Which task is this SOP for, and why does it matter (quality, safety, money,
customers)?
Question 3: Who does this task now, and who should be able to do it?
Question 4: Walk me through how the task is done today, step by step, from start to
finish.
Question 5: What equipment, materials or software are needed?
Question 6: What usually goes wrong, and what happens when it does?
Question 7: How do I know the task has been done well? What does good look like?
Question 8: Are there safety, hygiene or regulatory points to follow?
Question 9: What records should be kept (forms, logbooks, photos, spreadsheets)?

Definitions:
- Each step starts with an action word and describes ONE action, short enough for a new
staff member to follow.
- A "quality check" is a point where the person stops and confirms something is right
before moving on.

Then produce, in the chat:
A. The SOP with these sections: title; purpose; when it applies; who is responsible;
equipment and materials; safety points; numbered steps, with quality checks marked
clearly; what to do if something goes wrong; records to keep; version and review date.
B. A one-page quick guide (steps only) that can be printed and posted where the work
happens.
C. Steps in my current way of working that look risky, wasteful or unclear, and how the
SOP fixes them.
D. How to train someone on this SOP and check they can do it.
E. A list of any assumptions you made.

Use only the steps I describe, plus any obvious gaps you point out to me. Do not invent
regulations, standards or legal requirements. Where safety, hygiene or product rules
matter, tell me which kind of rule to check (for example NAFDAC for food and drink, or
workplace safety law) and suggest I confirm the details with the regulator or an expert.

WORD FILE: Also create a downloadable Word document (.docx) with the full SOP, followed by
the one-page quick guide on its own page with large text. Name the file "[my business
name] SOP [task name]". Use clear headings, numbered steps, simple tables and plain
English. If you cannot create files, tell me clearly, then give me the full text with
headings so I can paste it into Word or Google Docs.

Finish by asking me: "Who will you train on this SOP first, and by when?"
```

Sample output: Ewa Foods, SOP for frying and packing plantain chips (extract)

Section	Content
Purpose	Make every batch of plantain chips crisp, evenly golden, safe to eat and correctly packed and labelled
Who is responsible	Production lead (accountable); trained production assistants (do the work)
Safety points	Hairnets, aprons and clean gloves at all times; fire blanket and extinguisher beside the fryer; never leave hot oil unattended
Records	Production log: batch number, quantity, oil change, rejected packs, name of person in charge
Review	Version 1, January 2027; review every 6 months or after any quality complaint

Steps

1. Wash hands and put on hairnet, apron and gloves.
2. Peel and slice ripe-but-firm plantain to the thickness on the slicer guide.
3. Heat oil to the temperature on the fryer guide. **Quality check:** confirm the temperature with the thermometer before the first batch.
4. Fry one basket at a time until evenly golden. **Quality check:** remove any dark or burnt chips.
5. Drain and cool chips on the rack for at least 10 minutes before seasoning.
6. Season using the measured scoop for each tray.
7. Fill packs on the scale. **Quality check:** each pack weighs 100g, plus or minus 2g.
8. Seal each pack and check the seal by pressing gently. Reject any pack that leaks air.
9. Print the batch number and best-before date on each pack.
10. Pack 24 packs per carton, label the carton, and record the batch in the production log.

If something goes wrong: if oil smokes or catches fire, turn off the heat and use the fire blanket, never water. If more than 5% of a batch is rejected, stop and tell the production lead before frying the next batch.

Risks fixed by the SOP: chips were seasoned while hot and went soggy; packs were filled by eye and varied by up to 10g; batch numbers were sometimes missed, which would make a product recall impossible.

Check before you rely on this

☐ Did the person who does the task check the steps?

☐ Are quality checks clearly marked?

☐ Have safety and hygiene points been confirmed against the rules that apply to your product?

☐ Can a new staff member follow the quick guide without asking questions?

Decide from this

- Who will you train first?
- Which other task needs an SOP next?

Prompt 2: What must happen every day?

Builds: a daily operations checklist split into opening, during the day and closing, with owners and critical items, plus weekly and monthly tasks. **Excel file:** Daily Operations Checklist.

The prompt (copy everything in the box)

```
Act as an experienced operations adviser who works with small businesses and early-stage
founders in Nigeria and Africa.

Help me build a daily operations checklist, so the important things get done every day, in
the right order, by the right person, without me checking everything myself.

How to work with me:
- Ask the questions below ONE AT A TIME and wait for each answer.
- Keep your replies short: no more than 3 or 4 sentences between questions. Save
explanations for the final results.
- If I'm unsure about an answer, help me think it through with one or two simple follow-up
questions.
- If I have a RACI matrix from the OVL People Toolkit, I can paste it.

Question 1: What is my business called, and what does it do?
Question 2: What are my working hours and days?
Question 3: What must happen at the start of each day before work or trading begins?
Question 4: What must happen during the day (production, sales, deliveries, customer
service, cash handling)?
Question 5: What must happen at the end of the day before closing?
Question 6: Which tasks are weekly or monthly rather than daily?
Question 7: Who is responsible for each area?
Question 8: What problems happen when things are forgotten (for example running out of
stock, cash shortages, missed deliveries)?

Definitions:
- Each checklist item is something a person can tick as done or not done, with an owner
and a time.
- "Critical" items are those that cause real damage if missed, such as safety, cash or a
customer delivery.

Then produce, in the chat:
A. A daily checklist in three parts (opening, during the day, closing), with time, task,
owner, and whether it is critical. No more than 25 items in total.
B. A separate weekly and monthly checklist.
C. What the person in charge should do if a critical item is missed.
D. How to introduce the checklist to the team so they actually use it.
E. A list of any assumptions you made.

Do not invent regulations, standards or legal requirements. Where safety, hygiene or
product rules matter, tell me which kind of rule to check (for example NAFDAC for food and
drink, or workplace safety law) and suggest I confirm the details with the regulator or an
expert.

EXCEL FILE: Also create a downloadable Excel file (.xlsx) named "[my business name] Daily
Operations Checklist" with these sheets:
- "Daily": one row per task with time, task, owner and critical flag, and one column per
day of the month with a drop-down (Done, Not done, N/A). Not done on a critical item turns
red automatically.
- "Weekly and Monthly": the less frequent tasks, with the same drop-down and colours.
- "Summary": formulas that show the % of tasks completed each day and each week, and count
missed critical items.
Use live Excel formulas. If you cannot create files, tell me clearly, then give me each
sheet as a table I can paste straight into Excel.

Finish by asking me: "Who will check the checklist each day, and when will you start?"
```

Sample output: Ewa Foods (extract)

Time	Task	Owner	Critical
7:30	Handwashing station stocked; hairnets and gloves available	Production lead	Yes
7:30	Fryer, gas and generator checked; enough diesel for the day	Production lead	Yes
7:45	Today's orders checked against stock of finished packs	Sales officer	Yes
8:00	Production plan for the day agreed	Production lead	No
Each batch	Production log updated	Production lead	No
10:00	Deliveries loaded and on the road, with delivery notes	Driver	Yes
By 12:00 and 4:00	WhatsApp and Instagram orders answered	Sales officer	No
Same day	Signed delivery notes photographed and sent to the accountant	Driver	Yes
4:30	All cash and transfers for the day recorded	Sales officer	Yes
5:00	Fryer and gas off; oil covered and stored	Production lead	Yes
5:00	Production area cleaned	Production assistants	No
5:15	Count of finished packs recorded	Production lead	No

Weekly: plantain orders placed on Monday and Thursday; oil change recorded; deep clean on Saturday.
Monthly: fire extinguisher checked; generator serviced; accountant checks NAFDAC and CAC renewal dates.

If a critical item is missed: the owner tells the production lead straight away, and the miss is noted in the checklist with what was done about it. Two misses of the same item in a month go to the monthly review.

Check before you rely on this

☐ Is every item something a person can tick as done or not done?
☐ Does every item have one owner?
☐ Are there 25 items or fewer each day?
☐ In the Excel file, mark a critical item "Not done" and check it turns red.

Decide from this

- Who checks the checklist each day?
- Which critical item worries you most?

Prompt 3: Where is my process slowing us down?

Builds: a step-by-step map of one process as it runs today, the biggest problems and their cost, and an improved version with a 30-day plan. **Word file:** Process Map.

The prompt (copy everything in the box)

```
Act as an experienced operations adviser who works with small businesses and early-stage
founders in Nigeria and Africa.

Help me map one important process in my business from start to finish, find where it slows
down or goes wrong, and redesign it to be faster, cheaper or more reliable.

How to work with me:
- Ask the questions below ONE AT A TIME and wait for each answer.
- Keep your replies short: no more than 3 or 4 sentences between questions. Save
explanations for the final results.
- If I'm unsure about an answer, help me think it through with one or two simple follow-up
questions.

Question 1: What is my business called, and what does it do?
Question 2: Which process do I want to improve (for example order to payment, buying
supplies, hiring, handling complaints)? Where does it start and end?
Question 3: Walk me through every step as it happens today. For each step: who does it,
and roughly how long it takes or how long it waits before the next step.
Question 4: Where do delays, mistakes, complaints or extra costs happen?
Question 5: What does the process cost me when it goes wrong (lost sales, late payment,
waste, overtime)?
Question 6: What would "good" look like for this process? Give me a target if I have one.
Question 7: What can't change (for example a customer's rules, a regulator's requirement,
a supplier's schedule)?

Definitions:
- "Waiting time" is time when nothing happens: the job sits in a queue, an inbox or a
pile.
- A "handover" is where the work passes from one person to another. Handovers are where
most delays and mistakes happen.

Then produce, in the chat:
A. The current process as a table: step number, step, who, time taken, waiting time, and
problems.
B. The total time from start to end, and how much of it is waiting.
C. The three biggest problems, with their cost to the business in time or Naira where I
have given figures.
D. The improved process as a table in the same format, with every change explained.
E. The expected improvement: time saved, money saved or freed up, and errors avoided. Show
your working.
F. A 30-day plan to introduce the new process, with owners.
G. A list of any assumptions you made.

Only use costs and times I have given you or that you calculate from them. Do not invent
regulations, standards or legal requirements. Where safety, hygiene or product rules
matter, tell me which kind of rule to check (for example NAFDAC for food and drink, or
workplace safety law) and suggest I confirm the details with the regulator or an expert.

WORD FILE: Also create a downloadable Word document (.docx) with the current process, the
improved process, the expected improvement and the 30-day plan. Include a simple flow
diagram of the improved process if you can. Name the file "[my business name] Process Map
[process name]". Use clear headings, numbered steps, simple tables and plain English. If
you cannot create files, tell me clearly, then give me the full text with headings so I
can paste it into Word or Google Docs.

CALCULATIONS: If you can run code, use it for every calculation and to build any file.
Check every total before you show it. If a figure in the chat and the same figure in the
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file disagree, tell me, and treat the file's formula as correct.

Finish by asking me: "Which change will you make first, and how will you know it worked?"
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Sample output: Ewa Foods, supermarket order to payment

Today

Step	Who	Waiting before next step	Problem
1. Order arrives on the founder's WhatsApp	Founder	1 day	Founder often busy; orders sit unread
2. Stock checked and order confirmed	Founder and production lead	1 day	Two people involved for a simple check
3. Chips produced and packed	Production lead	None (1 day of work)	
4. Order delivered	Driver	None (half a day)	
5. Signed delivery notes returned to office	Driver	3 days on average	Notes brought back in a batch on Fridays
6. Invoice prepared and sent	Founder	2 days	Founder does invoices when she has time
7. Payment terms run	Supermarket	60 days from invoice	Agreed terms; can't change for now
8. Late payments chased	Founder	5 days late on average	No reminder before the due date

Total time from order to payment: about 73 days. Only about a day and a half of that is work. The rest is waiting.

Improved process: orders go to a shared WhatsApp group the sales officer answers the same day; the driver photographs each signed delivery note and sends it straight to the accountant; the accountant sends the invoice the same day and a reminder on day 55; the sales officer calls on day 60 if payment hasn't arrived.

Expected improvement: order to payment falls from about 73 days to about 62. Ewa sells about ₦3 million a month to supermarkets and distributors on credit. Getting paid 11 days sooner frees up about ₦1.1 million in cash (₦3,000,000 × 11 ÷ 30), once, at no cost.

30-day plan: week 1, set up the orders WhatsApp group (sales officer); week 2, start photographing delivery notes (driver); week 3, same-day invoices and day-55 reminders (accountant); week 4, check the first results at the monthly review (founder).

Check before you rely on this

☐ Did the people who do each step check the map?

☐ Are times and costs based on real records, not guesses?

☐ Does the improved process respect what can't change, such as customers' terms?

☐ Is the expected saving worked out from your own figures?

Decide from this

- Which change will you make first?
- How will you measure whether it worked?

Check before you rely on any AI operations output

Run through this list every time, whichever prompt you used.

☐ **It matches how the work is really done.** The people who do the work have checked it. Delete anything the AI made up.

☐ **Safety and rules are confirmed.** Safety, hygiene and product requirements have been checked with the regulator or a qualified expert, not taken from the AI.

☐ **Every step and task has one owner.** It agrees with your RACI matrix if you have one.

☐ **It is simple enough to use.** A new staff member could follow it without asking questions.

☐ **Savings are worked out from your own figures.** Times, costs and savings come from your records.

☐ **It is saved and dated.** Save each file with a version number and date, and review SOPs every six months.

The AI is a fast assistant, not someone who has watched your team work. Walk through every new procedure on the floor with the people who will use it before you make it official.

Next steps

With these documents, your important tasks are written down, your team knows what must happen every day, and you have a way to fix processes that cost you time and money.

- **Retake the Business Health Check** in three months to see how your Operations score has changed.
- **Use the other toolkits.** Finance, Strategy, People, Marketing and Sales, and Performance follow the same format.
- **Get expert support.** Outlier Venture Lab works with founders on operations, financial models and fundraising. Get in touch through our website to book a session.

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